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# THE LAST LAUGH

LET'S HOPE SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE DOESN'T THINK CASTING ONE AFRICAN AMERICAN ACTRESS SOLVES THEIR DIVERSITY PROBLEMS, BECAUSE LATINA COMEDIANS ARE OUT THERE, KNOCKING LOUDLY, WAITING TO BRING THE FUNNY.

BY CELIA SHATZMAN

## SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE DOESN'T THINK MUCH OF LATINAS.

■ **WEARING A BRIGHT FLORAL DRESS WITH A HUGE RED FLOWER BEHIND ONE EAR,** Marisol was a dim-witted Venezuelan girlfriend whose accent was so thick you could barely understand what she was saying. This was a character—played by Cecily Strong, a white actress, no less—in an *SNL* sketch aired last spring. Unsurprisingly, a lot of people didn't find it funny, including Wendy Mateo and Lorena Díaz, the duo behind the comedy team *Dominizuelan*, named for their Dominican and Venezuelan roots, respectively.

They got their revenge by posting a video on YouTube called “Ms. Latina Stereotype Explains Hollywood,” satirizing the clueless *SNL* character. Opening with an over-the-top application of hair spray and red lipstick, Díaz, dressed in a cleavage-baring tight dress, discusses her misogynistic boyfriend and popularity in Hollywood in an exaggerated accent.

This isn't the first time *SNL* has come under fire for a lack of diversity. After a public controversy last year, the show's execs hurriedly added an African American female cast member, Sasheer Zamata, and two writers, LaKendra Tookes and Leslie Jones. Despite the presence of featured player Noël Wells, who has some Hispanic heritage, a group of Latina comics took to Twitter (#StillNoLatinas) in an attempt to get *SNL* to take action. (At press time, Wells had been cut from the cast and *SNL* had not yet announced any new hires.)

But there's a growing talent pool of comics for them to draw on: Latina up-and-comers are performing regularly at industry incubators—like Renee Santos at Los Angeles's Upright Citizens Brigade, Jesenia Bailey at New York's UCB and Gwen La Roka at

FROM TOP: Stand-up Patti Vasquez performs; *Saturday Night Live*'s Cecily Strong and Mika O'Brien in the Marisol sketch.





Wendy Mateo and Lorena Díaz of the comedy duo Dominizuelan.



Chicago's Laugh Factory.

Opportunities for Latina comedians aren't just limited to network TV anymore, with Netflix and Amazon producing content and comedians such as Cameron Esposito gaining traction on YouTube. "There is a tremendous amount of potential to put your material online and create your own success," says Mexican and Irish stand-up Patti Vasquez, who hosts her own show on WGN radio in Chicago. Vasquez stresses the importance of writing original material instead of waiting for the right parts to come along. "When people say there aren't enough roles for Latinas in Hollywood, I say we need more Latinas writing scripts," she says.

In the end, Vasquez believes, authenticity trumps ethnicity. "It's about being yourself and being honest," she says. "People identify across gender and racial lines, and if you put in the effort, the audience will respond."

One Latina writing her own story is Cristela Alonzo, whose sitcom, *Cristela*—about a perpetual law student who still lives at home with her traditional Mexican American family—premieres this fall on ABC. Alonzo is the cocreator, co-executive producer, writer and star of the program, which may prove to be groundbreaking in another area: after filming the

pilot, a producer asked Alonzo and the cast to do a scene in Spanish to show that *Cristela* could be done in both languages.

"It was amazing," Alonzo wrote on her blog. "The jokes translated. I have to say that was probably one of my favorite parts of the night. To have a show that could be shot in both English and Spanish simultaneously was pretty historic."

"I actually think it's a phenomenal time to be a Latina, and a woman in comedy," says Dominizuelan's Díaz. "The major networks are starting to understand their demos and are doing a better job of producing content that's relevant to them. Wendy and I feel like we're getting to a place where networks don't have to be convinced to produce ethnic content."

"We need to be supporting each other, not only as Latinas but also in American pop culture," Mateo says. When the Dominizuelan ladies moved to Chicago, they were part of a circle of Latino comedians who made a pact to help one another. "We're the production assistant on one set and then the star," she says. "It's always for the love of the art and producing the highest-quality product possible, because that's what is going to get us out there. Ultimately you want to see yourself reflected—you want to feel equal in media and in life."